



Reopening New York City: What Child Care Programs Need to Know

To operate your child care program, you must follow New York State (NYS) [requirements](#) designed to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

For answers to key questions about reopening, please read [Reopening New York City: Frequently Asked Questions](#). Not all questions will be relevant, but we hope this will help you implement new requirements. The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC Health Department) has additional information and tools for reopening and maintaining operations during the COVID-19 public health emergency, which can be accessed [here](#).

Visit nyc.gov/health/coronavirus for updates. City and State requirements may change as we learn more about COVID-19, and the best ways to reduce transmission and keep New Yorkers safe.

Remember the four key actions to prevent COVID-19 transmission:

- **Stay home if sick:** Stay home if you are sick unless you are leaving for essential medical care (including [COVID-19 testing](#)) or other essential errands.
- **Physical distancing:** Stay at least 6 feet away from other people.
- **Wear a face covering:** Protect yourself those around you. You can be contagious without symptoms and spread the disease when you cough, sneeze, talk or breathe. Face coverings help reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- **Practice healthy hand hygiene:** Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available; clean frequently touched surfaces regularly; avoid touching your face with unwashed hands; and cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve, not your hands.

Together we can reduce COVID-19 transmission in New York City.

What do I have to do to legally reopen my business?

Required steps before you reopen

- Develop a [safety plan](#) and post it at your work site.
- Read and affirm compliance. NYS requires that you affirm you have reviewed and understand the State-issued industry guidelines, and that you will implement them. You can fill out the affirmation form at forms.ny.gov/s3/ny-forward-affirmation.
- Have a valid child care [permit](#) from the NYC Health Department.

Physical Distancing

Do children and staff in the same cohort (static group) need to stay 6 feet apart during activities (such as lunch, gym or playtime)?

Staff and children do not need to stay 6 feet apart while in their static group. However, each static group needs to maintain at least 6 feet of distance from other static groups.

How many square feet is required per child? Does this include the 6 feet required for physical distancing?

The NYC Health Code requires 30 square feet per child for Article 47 child care programs. The 6 feet required for physical distancing can be part of the NYC Health Code's 30 square feet requirement. While there is no minimum square feet per child requirement for Article 43 programs, the 6 feet for physical distancing requirement still applies.

Where can child care programs get free signs that describe how to prevent the spread of COVID-19? Where should these signs be posted?

The NYC Health Department's Prevent the Spread sign can be found [here](#). Signs should be posted throughout the facility, including by entrances, in restrooms and break rooms, and by handwashing areas. For additional posters and flyers related to COVID-19, available in several languages, visit [here](#).

During naptime, how should cots and sleeping mats be arranged if 6 feet of distance between children cannot be achieved?

If the recommended 6 feet of distance cannot be achieved, cots and sleeping mats should be placed at least 2 feet apart, with children arranged from head to toe.

To decrease the number of children per classroom, can child care programs carve out some of their space to create new classrooms?

A child care program can create new classroom space as long as the maximum capacity remains consistent with the Certificate of Occupancy and the program has received NYC Health Department approval. Creating additional classroom space must not increase the overall classroom or program capacity.

To get NYC Health Department approval, programs must submit an amendment request through [ACCELA](#) or reach out to their [borough office](#) representative.

Are parents allowed to be on the child care premises?

Nonessential visitors are prohibited from entering child care programs. Programs must put in place procedures to maintain at least 6 feet of distance between all people (including parents, guardians, staff and children) during child drop-off and pick-up. If a parent needs to enter the program facility, they will be required to undergo a health screening and will not be allowed to enter the program if they have COVID-19 symptoms, have tested positive for COVID-19 or were recently exposed to the virus.

Protective Equipment

What are the face covering requirements for children under 2 years old? What are the requirements for children over age 2?

Children under 2 years old should not wear face coverings. Children over age 2 do not need to wear face coverings while in the child care facility or outdoor spaces exclusively used by the program.

Are face shields acceptable face coverings?

No. Face shields are not acceptable face coverings as they do not fully cover the nose and mouth. A face shield can be used in addition to (but not as a substitute for) an acceptable face covering.

What are the recommendations for installing physical barriers to comply with relevant laws?

If a child care program chooses to install barriers, install nonflammable barriers in accordance with [Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines](#), as well as applicable NYS and NYC building and fire codes. Acrylic plastic products (like plexiglass) may be flammable. Consult a professional to make sure the product and its installation is safe and code-compliant.

Where can programs find information on how to properly use personal protective equipment (PPE)?

Programs can find information on using PPE on the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website](#).

Do employees need to submit medical proof that they cannot tolerate wearing a face covering?

While medical proof is not required, programs are encouraged to obtain medical documentation for any employee who is unable to wear a face covering. Medical documentation does not have to identify a specific illness or condition.

Hygiene, Cleaning and Disinfection

Are carpets and rugs allowed in child care programs?

While carpets and rugs are allowed in child care programs, programs should use floor coverings that can be easily cleaned and disinfected.

What are the guidelines for dramatic play outfits, stuffed animals or other soft toys in the classroom?

Child care programs must limit the use of toys that cannot be easily cleaned and disinfected between users (such as dress-up clothes, puppets and stuffed animals). If these items are used, they must not be shared.

What are the requirements for storing and cleaning beds and bedding?

When storing beds and bedding (such as sheets and blankets), make sure one child's bed or bedding does not touch another's. Bedding should not be shared unless cleaned and disinfected between users.

Are children allowed to use hand sanitizers?

Children can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing 60% or more alcohol when hand-washing with soap and water is not available or practical. Place signs near hand sanitizer stations to remind staff that visibly soiled hands should be washed with soap and water, as hand sanitizer is not effective if hands are visibly dirty.

Child Care Activities

Can children be taken to off-site playgrounds and public parks, on walks around the neighborhood or on field trips?

Children can be taken to playgrounds, public parks and walks around the neighborhood as long as parental permission is obtained and the child care program is following trip policies and procedures outlined in the Safety Plan. When off-site, children over age 2 must wear face coverings.

Are children and staff in the same static group allowed to have lunch together without physical distancing?

Yes. Members of the same static group can have lunch together and do not need to maintain physical distance. Tables accommodating multiple static groups must be placed at least 6 feet apart.

Are child care programs allowed to cater food to children and staff?

Yes. Child care programs can provide catered food to children and staff as long as it is prepared, stored and served in accordance with §47.61 of the NYC Health Code and served in individual portions.

Screening

Before reopening a child care program, do staff or children need to be tested for COVID-19 or antibodies?

No.

Do health screenings need to be performed daily for the children and staff in the child care program? Do programs need to maintain screening documentation?

Yes. Child care programs are required to conduct daily health screenings for all who plan to enter the facility. Programs must document that all individuals were screened and those admitted on to the site were cleared.

What is a contact of a contact? Can they enter a child care program?

A contact of a contact is most easily defined with an example. If a parent was exposed to someone diagnosed with COVID-19, the parent is considered a contact who needs to quarantine for 10 days from the last contact with the person diagnosed with COVID-19, to prevent spread to others if the parent is infected. The child living with the parent who was exposed is a contact of a contact. A contact of a contact can enter a child care program during the contact's quarantine period. Thus, in this example, the child can still attend child care while the parent is quarantining.

For more information on health screening and handling a case, see [Daily Health Screening and Handling a Case of COVID-19 in Child Care: What Child Care Operators Need to Know](#).

Communications

Are child care programs required to submit the NYS-required Safety Plan to the NYC Health Department’s Bureau of Child Care?

No. Child care programs do not need to submit the Safety Plan to the Bureau of Child Care. However, they must create the plan, post it on-site and have it ready to share with NYC Health Department staff upon request.

Coverage and Group Size

Are child care programs allowed to combine classes or static groups for early care or extended care?

Child care programs are strongly encouraged to keep children in their static groups.

What is the maximum group size now allowed by NYS? How does that compare to the maximum group size in Article 47?

Currently, the maximum group size is 15 children as long as the classroom has an overall approved capacity of at least 15 children based on the 30 square feet per child requirement. If the overall classroom capacity is less than 15, the group must be reduced to that size. The table below compares maximum group sizes under NYS COVID-19 requirements to group sizes during more “normal” times:

Age of Children	Maximum Group Size* (As per Article 47 of the NYC Health Code)	Maximum Group Size* (As per NYS COVID-19 requirements)
Under 12 months	8	8
12 to 24 months	10	10
2 years to under 3	12	12
3 years to under 4	15	15
4 years to under 5	20	15
5 years to under 6	25	15

*Per room, or area separated from other rooms and areas by a physical barrier

Other

Are there any changes on how fire drills should be conducted?

Fire drills should be conducted as usual. Once safely outside of the facility, static groups should remain together and at least 6 feet apart from other groups.

To limit mixing of static groups, fire drills can be conducted one static group at a time. Children ages 2 and older should wear face coverings as much as possible during a fire drill.

Is there guidance on ventilation requirements, particularly for child care programs that do not have windows and use a ventilation system?

Make sure system air intake and exhaust ducts and grills, both internal and external, are clean and free from obstruction. Make sure the system has been maintained and its flow rate meets the air exchange rate established for the ventilation system's make and model. Check that the external air mix ratio for the unit is being maintained.

If choosing filtration, air filters with a Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value (MERV) of 13 should be used for viral spread control. Most readily available filters trap dust, pollen, and mold spores, but will not trap much smaller viral particles.

Will child care programs be cited for not following NYS COVID-19 requirements?

Yes. NYC will be educating businesses about how to comply with reopening requirements. Inspectors may visit businesses to promote compliance.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

1.13.21